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1961/11/06

211. Memorandum for the Record¹

Washington, November 6, 1961.

SUBJECT

Meeting to discuss the recommendations of the Taylor Mission to South Viet-Nam

PRESENT

General Taylor	Secretary McNamara
Under Secretary Alexis Johnson	Lt General Cabell
Under Secretary Ball	Mr. Hamilton
Mr. Rostow	Assistant Secretary Bundy
Mr. Bissell	Mr. Cottrell
General Lemnitzer	LCdr Bagley
Under Secretary Gilpatric	

1. General Taylor opened the meeting with a broad assessment of the situation in South Viet-Nam as he saw it during his trip. From the background thus set, he outlined his recommendations to alter the situation favorably. These remarks essentially included—and broadened—the content of messages to the President forwarded from SEA by General Taylor.

2. In answer to specific questions, General Taylor said:

- a. The Provincial Survey proposed does not duplicate work done by the Staley Group.
- b. Withdrawal of US forces on the basis of completion of a flood relief task would be a matter of months.

3. General Taylor, in reporting the initial reactions of the President² to his recommendations, stated:

- a. The President had many questions. He is instinctively against introduction of US forces.

¹Source: National Defense University, Taylor Papers, T-127-69. Top Secret. Prepared by Bagley; the date on the source text is apparently the drafting date rather than the date the conference took place. The subject matter, the participants, and the course of the discussion suggest that the conference took place November 4.

²Apparently a reference to Taylor's meeting with the President the previous day; see footnote 1, *supra*.

b. The President, at the high level meeting scheduled for 7 November, would like participants to address themselves to:

- (1) Their opinion as to the quality of the proposed program.
- (2) Implications and meaning of the program if implemented.
- (3) How the program should be implemented.

c. The President hoped that Diem would broaden the representation in his government as an earnest to increased US assistance.

4. The comments of those present followed the lines as outlined below:

McNamara: The recommendations in themselves, including the "8000-man force" would not save South Viet-Nam from Communism. It is a US commitment to the ground and other forces would be made ready. It is not a temporary commitment; without the "8000-man force", the recommendations will not save South Viet-Nam; with it, they might.

Small actions without words are not necessarily useful. There should be a commitment with the introduction of a US force; we need a clear objective to plan properly. Tell the world and the US what our commitment really is; the "8000-man force" does not convince anyone of our resolve. In Laos, our objective was never understood. The objective should be in a broad context—secure independence of South Viet-Nam—and resources should be applied against North Viet-Nam.

On Tuesday, the agenda should be restricted to:

- a. What is US objective in South Viet-Nam?
- b. How far do we want to go?
- c. How far do we want to state it publicly?

The forces—6 to 8 divisions—required to meet Communist escalation in SEA are available. Put this factor aside and discuss decision on basis of value of area to the US.

Johnson: The Delta is not the place to put US forces; the Plateau is better. Can we save South Viet-Nam with steps short of putting in US forces?

Ball: The placing of the "8000-man force" in South Viet-Nam commits us to unlimited action. Why wait on going at Hanoi? Maybe USSR will be glad to see us engaged in SEA. It is difficult to tell US people we are undertaking a limited series of actions; easier to say we are making a full commitment. If we make such a full commitment—and it is necessary to make the "8000-man force" creditable—we should move fast. A larger force is preferable.³

Rostow: Question really is whether we will accept a guerrilla war supported externally as a legal international process. We should take the limited actions recommended by General Taylor, surface the Jordan paper with necessary follow-up, then look to Hanoi. The Vice President's trip and the Taylor Mission lay on the need for

³ For his recollection of the discussion at this meeting, see Ball, *The Past Has Another Pattern*, p. 366.

action. There is no soft option. Hanoi and Peking have basic weaknesses which lessen the risk to US action.

Lemnitzer: Employment of "8000-man force" will result in combat forces being thinned out in an area in which it is hard to operate. We must commit the number of troops required for success.

Bissell: Taylor recommendations are useful for they represent action, not talk. Laos is an opposite example.

5. In response, General Taylor stated his recommendations were made in response to the Presidential directive to bolster the GVN to win their own war. The proposals should be tried, the US position kept flexible, and the GVN watched for proper follow-up.

WHB⁴

⁴ Printed from a copy that bears these typed initials.